All in one, One in All

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Good morning, my dear friends, today is the 11th of August 1997, and we are in the upper hamlet of Plum Village. I guess that everyone here has seen the lotus pond in the lower hamlet. Yesterday I conducted a walking meditation to the lotus pond, and then we went to the plum trees. It was very nice. We enjoyed the lotus and we also enjoyed the plum trees. Many of you were not there. But it looked like Paradise, it was Paradise, and it still is available. Later, you will realize that the lotus pond is not only in the lower hamlet, but in your heart. When you go home to your town and to your house, and every time you sit down quietly and you focus your attention on the lotus pond and the lotus pond will be born again from within you.

Our mind has all kinds of seeds in it. You have a seed of the lotus pond within you. Every time you use your mindfulness and you touch the seed of the lotus pond in you, you can see the lotus pond with all these flowers and big leaves like this. You don't have to go to the lower hamlet to really have the lotus pond. You may ask the question "Where has the lotus pond come from?" I will tell you.

Today I have my pebble bag, but instead of having six pebbles, I have something else in it. My bag is full of lotus seeds. And all the lotuses in the lower hamlet came from a tiny seed like this. We just begin with one seed. Can you look into this seed and see the whole lotus pond and hundreds of lotus flowers and lotus leaves? Can you imagine that all the lotuses and all the leaves of the lotuses come from this tiny little seed? Yet this is true. I'll tell you how to make this lotus seed into a lotus pond. It's easy. Please listen, because I'm going to offer each of you one lotus seed, so that when you go home, you'll be able to make a lotus pond.

You know that a lotus seed has to be planted in mud with water because it does not grow well in dry soil. You think that this seed can be just put into the mud and you can wait until it sprouts, but it will not sprout if you just put it in the mud, because the lotus seed is made of a kernel inside and also a very hard skin outside. Even if you leave the lotus seed three weeks or five weeks or ten weeks within the mud, it will not sprout, even if the mud is full of water. I know that

there are lotuses that remain alive for more than one thousand years, and after one thousand years we plant it, it can still grow into a lotus plant.

So you should know how to help the lotus seed to sprout. This is the secret: you have to help the water to penetrate into the lotus seed. You may use a little knife, a little saw, and you cut just a little bit, about half a millimeter, so that the water has a chance to penetrate into the lotus and about four or five days later, the lotus seed will sprout and become a tiny lotus plant. If you hold a lotus seed like this and you rap it against a rock for one minute, this part of the skin of the lotus will be removed, so that that spot of the lotus skin will allow the water to get in, and five days after, it will sprout. You will see very tiny lotus leaves and the lotus leaves can get as big as this cup. You keep it in your yard if it is in the spring or summer or autumn, but when it is cold, you bring it into your house. It will continue to grow, and when spring comes you can bring it out, and you can change the container into a bigger one, and the lotus plant will become bigger and bigger. In one year you will begin to have a few lotus flowers, and in three years you will have a lotus pond as big as the one in the lower hamlet, and if you want it can be ten times bigger. Do you think that you can do it? You can make a lotus pond as big as this.

I will offer each child in this assembly one lotus seed, and I trust that you will keep it well and bring it home to make that experiment. You will learn that a huge lotus pond is contained within this. Ancestors of the lotus have transmitted all the talents, all the fragrance, all the beauties in this tiny seed, and if this seed knows how to practice, it will manifest all this talent, all these beauties, all these wonders from within it, and offer themselves to the world.

Each of you is a seed, a wonderful seed like a seed of lotus. You look a little bit bigger than a lotus seed, but you are a wonderful seed. In you there are a lot of talents. Compassion is in you. Understanding is in you. Love is in you. The capacity to smile is in you, the capacity to help other people be happy is in you. Because these wonderful virtues, these wonderful qualities, have been transmitted to you by your ancestors, your blood ancestors and your spiritual ancestors. If you know how to sprout and to grow, you will be a very beautiful lotus pond and you will offer a lot of happiness to many, many people around you, not only people, but animals, plants and minerals. A tiny lotus seed can make so many people happy. It has made me happy. A television man from Paris came to Plum Village and he saw some lotus flowers, and he reported on French television that lotus flowers bloom like mushrooms in Plum Village.

We have so many kinds of wonderful seeds within us, and if we know how to help the seeds to sprout, we'll be very happy and we'll be able to offer a lot of

happiness to so many people. We already have a lot of good seeds in us, and we continue to receive seeds. When I look at you with loving eyes, and with the eyes of trust and admiration, a good seed is planted in you. I help plant a seed of faith, of confidence, of compassion in you, just by looking at you with the eyes of love and compassion. And we can help each other by planting the positive and beautiful seeds in each other. Every sound you hear can be a seed, a good seed or a negative seed. Every sight you see can be received as a seed in yourself, a positive seed or a negative seed. That is why in Plum Village we try our best to maintain a place where you can only see positive sights and positive sounds. In fact, Plum Village is a sanctuary of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We come together here and try to protect the environment so that we will not see things that are not the dharma. We will not hear anything that is not the dharma. Everything translates the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that is why while you are in Plum Village you are safe. Every sight, every sound, every face, every touch should contain the dharma in it, and you are protected by the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

I know in America, in Europe, there are national parks where animals are protected. There are sanctuaries for animals, and you are not allowed to go in and shoot a deer or a rabbit. They are safe. So Plum Village is a kind of sanctuary like that where the Five Mindfulness Trainings are protected. If anyone shoots one of these precepts down, we have to tell him, to ask him, to leave, because we don't want the precepts shot down in our territory. We can do that only with the collaboration of everyone. The Five Mindfulness Trainings practiced by the whole Sangha will transform this place into a sanctuary where everyone is safe. There is no sound, there is no sight, there is no touch that can create negative seeds in us. If we train ourselves well in Plum Village, we will go home and transform our home into a sanctuary also.

We use our television, we use our telephone, we use our kitchen in such a way that the mindfulness trainings can be kept alive all the time and we do that for the world, we do that for our family, we do that for ourselves. This is the teaching. So the lotus seed is here, in my two fingers, but it is there, in your heart, and you yourself are a wonderful seed and you should take care of yourself and we should be able to help you take care of yourself, so that one day you may sprout into a wonderful lotus pond, and you will make happiness for so many people. I think I have here enough lotus seed for each young person. Will you come each of you and receive one lotus seed? Maybe you would like to keep it in your pebble meditation bag. I will ask only two persons to come and I will ask Sister Gina to take care of distributing to each one of you one seed. OK. A young gentleman and a young lady?

Please breathe in and breathe out.

[Pause for one minute while distributing seeds.]

[To the young people:] When you hear the small bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

We have the habit of seeing things not inside of each other, but in Buddhist meditation we are advised to learn how to look at things, so that we can see things within each other. Usually we think that the lotus pond is outside of the lotus seed, and the lotus seed is outside of the lotus pond. But in fact, if we practice looking deeply, you realize that the lotus seed is in the lotus pond, but at the same time the lotus pond is in the lotus seed. When you look at your daddy, you may think that your daddy is outside you and you are outside your daddy. But if you look more closely, you will see that your daddy is not really outside. He is inside you, and you are inside your daddy.

When we were small, in the womb of our mother, there was a link between us and our mother called the umbilical cord. We were attached to our mother. We were a kind of one with our mother. Our mother breathed for us, ate for us, worried for us, drank for us, and smoked for us. [Laughter] So everything our mother did, we did because we were really one with our mother. When we were born, when we got out, they cut the umbilical cord and slowly we had the idea that our mother was different from us. But in fact, we continued to have that very close link with our mother. If our mother was not here, how could I be? So the umbilical cord, although you don't see it, still is there and we have to learn to look at the umbilical cord that is always there within us and our mother, and our grandmother, our grandfather, our ancestors.

You can touch it now. Since you are there, they are there, and they are not somewhere else. They are within you and you can touch them, because this hand is your hand, but of course it is also the hand of your mother. Remember when you had a fever as a child, you did not want to eat anything, drink anything, you suffered. And suddenly your mother came and put a hand on your forehead. You felt so good, and sometimes you wish that you still had that hand, that wonderful hand with you available at any time you suffer. But in fact, that hand is still available, because this is her hand. If you just breathe in and out and realize that this is also her hand, because your hand is a continuation of your

mother's hand. You breathe in and you put it on your forehead, and then you have it again available. So the umbilical cord is always there, as ever.

And if you look more closely you will see that between you and a cloud floating in the sky there is also an umbilical cord, because without the cloud floating in the sky you would have no water in your body. And if you look at the sun, there is an umbilical cord linking you with the sun, because without the sun there would be light, no heat, no warmth, and no food, no washed vegetables. You can see that the sun is a kind of father, a kind of mother.

Driving through the countryside of France in the summer, I look at the cows, I look at the hay, I look at the nice fields. I feel closely connected. I see the hay as the milk, the yogurt I eat in the morning, also the cornfield. I see the link between everything. The cow is a mother to me. You drink the milk from the cow, you have an umbilical cord between you and the cow, and the sunflower and the hay. To meditate means to train yourself to look in such a way, to see the nature of interconnectedness of everything. One day you will see that the idea of outside and inside are just ideas. Everything is inside. The one is the many. The British nuclear physicist David Bohm said that it seems that there are two kinds of order, the explicate order and the implicate order. These are two words invented by him. In the explicate order, everything seems to exist outside of everything else, like a flower is outside of the table, the flower is outside of the earth, is outside of the wind, of the cloud. Flower is not cloud, flower is not earth, flower is only flower. That is the way we used to look at things, and that world is called the explicate order. But if you look more deeply, you enter into the implicate order, where everything is in everything else.

In the teaching of the Buddha there are also two terms that are equivalent: *lokadhatu* and *Dharmadhatu*. Lokadhatu is the world and Dharmadhatu is also the world, but in lokadhatu it seems that everything is outside of everything else. You are not I and I am not you. You are not your father; your father is not you. But if you live deeply and you touch deeply, you will touch the Dharmadhatu where everything is in everything else.

The Buddha's teachings on the interconnectedness of everything, of the nature of inter-being of everything, are found in a very beautiful way in a sutra called the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The Avatamsaka Sutra is like a giant poem because it speaks in terms of image only. If you like poetry, you can enjoy the Avatamsaka Sutra and you can understand the Avatamsaka Sutra very easily. In the Avatamsaka Sutra you are invited to visit the Dharmadhatu, the land of bliss, the land of no sorrow. If you don't mind being yourself, body and mind together, and making only one step you can enter in the Dharmadhatu, the kingdom of God. In the

Dharmadhatu there is a lot of light. That is why you can see things much more clearly. We need light in order for us not to be blinded by ignorance. Every being in the Avatamsaka world, in the Dharmadhatu world, emits light from his or her body. When you enter that realm of bliss, you meet all kinds of people, animals, plants, and minerals, just like in this world. Imagine there are also businessmen, there are policemen, there are carpenters, there are teachers, there are students, there are little ones, there are old ones. We have every type of person in the Avatamsaka world, and each one of them emits light, the light of mindfulness. When they walk, when they sit, when they smile, they emit light, and you risk being struck by one beam emitted from them. And if you are struck by one light, you become mindful, and in turn you begin to emit light yourself. At first you step in and you are not very solid yet because you are not used to the Dharmadhatu realm. But as you make three, four, five steps, you are struck by so many beams coming from everyone else, because when they walk, when they sit, when they smile, when they do things, they emit light, the light of mindfulness, and if you are struck by one beam of mindfulness, you yourself become mindful, and very soon you will emit light from your body. This you can do.

Think of Plum Village. When you step into Plum Village, you see everyone walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, speaking mindfully, and by doing so they emit the light of mindfulness. You realize that they are mindful and the beams of mindfulness strike you, and suddenly you become mindful, you stop running, and there you are walking mindfully, and in your turn you send out beams that will strike other people who just come and they become mindful themselves. That is why it is described in the Avatamsaka Sutra that in the Dharmadhatu world there is a lot of light. Not only Buddhas, bodhisattvas, great beings emit light from their body, from their consciousness, but everyone, including the policeman, including the schoolteacher, including the carpenter, including the mason, including the farmer, and yourself.

The Avatamsaka world is available in the here and the now. There is so much light. Light is available, you can profit from the light. You yourself produce light to help the Avatamsaka realm to be more beautiful. In the Avatamsaka realm there is a lot of space. Space inside of you and space outside of you. Because when you enter the Avatamsaka realm you lay down all your worries, your projects in the future, you know how to dwell in the present moment and enjoy the light, enjoy the space that is offered by the realm.

So much space, so much freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from projects, freedom from the past, freedom from the futures, freedom even from the idea of how to be happy. There is so much space in the Avatamsaka realm. Everyone is free. Even the carpenter. He is not in a hurry. He does his job in a very relaxing

way, singing. Building a house is a matter of a lifetime. After you build one house, you have to build another one. Why do you have to hurry? So carpenters are building houses in the most beautiful way possible. The houses are beautiful also, because they have been built in mindfulness, in concentration.

In the Avatamsaka realm, the cook, she cooks mindfully. She enjoys cooking, she enjoys washing the dishes. Every minute of the work brings her peace and joy. She does not need to run, to wish that the work would be over for her to be free. Her freedom is available while she is cooking. She is singing. She is looking at everyone else with the eyes of compassion. And she is emitting light, the light of freedom, the light of happiness, the light of mindfulness. She is happy because there is a lot of space within her. She has space to love. To embrace, because in her, blocks of worries, blocks of anxieties, blocks of fears have been let down. Because the light that has struck has helped her to lay down all this kind of luggage that is not very useful for her life or for her happiness. Look around her. A lot of space. No matter where she finds herself there is space. Hills, rivers, mountains, low lands, high lands are for her she can enjoy every place. She feels like the moon traveling in empty sky. There is so much space around her.

The people who love her never want to lock her into a prison. Even the prison called love. The people who love her, the people around her allow her to be herself. And she allows people around her to be themselves, that is why all of them have space inside. And space outside. By loving each other, they offer each other space. They don't practice what we practice in the Lokadahtu: possessive love.

In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of time. You never run out of time. Time is for being alive. Time is not for other things. We know how to use time, we know how to enjoy time. Because time is light itself. Time over there is not money. Time is life. And there is no deadline. And because there is no deadline there is no stress. Freedom is what we have in the Avatamsaka world. Freedom is available. In the Avatamsaka world there are a lot of flowers. Looking at everything, we recognize it as a flower. Your hand is a flower. I remember saying, "Quiesce Que c'est Que l'automne? L'automne est une saison ou chaque feuille est une fleur (What is Autumn? Autumn is a season in which each leaf is a flower.) But in the Avatamsaka you don't have to wait till Autumn to see each leaf as a flower. You can see it as a flower in Spring. And what is wonderful is that a new flower contains all the flowers in it.

In the Avatamsaka there are a lot of lion seats where you can sit and you can feel like a lion, the king of the jungle. You feel like you are the king of yourself, the king of the Universe, you are not a slave, you are powerful, you have sovereignty

over yourself. Every seat where you seat becomes a lion seat. The foot of the bodhi tree. You don't have to travel to the foot of the bodhi tree. Every time you seat in mindfulness, that seat becomes the foot of the bodhi tree. And when you are in the Avatamsaka you know that the Buddha is available.

Where is Shakyamuni? You want to go there and pay a visit. In the Avatamsaka everything is in everything else. India is in Japan, Japan in America. You don't have to move. It's wonderful. You need to be yourself, mindful, and you can touch your root teacher anytime. You don't have to travel.

Suppose we hear the New York Times announcing that the Buddha will be available for a walking meditation at the foot of the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India next month. And whoever wants to sign up for a walking meditation with Shakyamuni is requested to do so because very soon there will not be any place on the airplanes. You love your teacher so much and you want to be with him and walking up and down the Gridhrakuta Mountain. You pick up your telephone and make a reservation on the plane so that you can arrive a few days earlier, you want to be sure. When you arrive you may get worried, there are so many people, thousands and thousands of people are flocking into the area, and you don't think that you are strong enough to push, push, push, and get close to the Buddha. Very frustrating! Your deepest wish is that you can get close to him, one meter, or if possible, a little bit closer, and someone can take a picture of you with the Buddha. So that when you go home, you can show people, “You see, I was with the Buddha.” But in spite of all these efforts, you are not sure to be able to meet the Buddha and to have a walking meditation with the Buddha.

But in the Avatamsaka world you don't have to buy any ticket, you don't have to make any reservation. You just practice mindful breathing in and out. And when you look you see the Gridhrakuta Mountain is right there, and the Buddha is right there and you just take his hand and you just walk and enjoy it. You don't even need to take a picture with him, because you are him, you are in him, and he is in you. Why do you need a picture of yourself?

In Plum Village I always see that it is beautiful. And if I can be completely satisfied walking here, I don't need to go the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The Buddha is here, available anytime. I don't complain that the Buddha lived two thousand six hundred years ago. No, I don't complain. Because I can touch him, to take his hand, and to practice walking meditation anytime. I don't have the need to take a camera, to make a reservation, to push, to come closer to the Buddha. And I am confident that you who have received the teaching can do the same, stay where you are and be happy.

We need only to be ourselves and to look a little bit deeply, and we are in the Avatamsaka realm. We see ourselves in each other, we see the past, the future, are in the present, and the present is in the past and the future. We become unlimited. Birth and death will not be able to bother us anymore. Because we have unlimited space, unlimited time. We transcend all kinds of borders. We are one with everything else.

In the Avatamsaka world, we'll meet a young person whose name is Sudhana. Sudhana is the disciple of a very illustrious teacher, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of great understanding. Sudhana is about thirteen or fourteen. He has practiced with his teacher, and his teacher taught him how to practice walking, sitting, and chanting. But his teacher is not a closed teacher. He said maybe my young disciple can learn with other teachers as well. So he urged his young student to go out and learn with other teachers. He does not say you are forbidden to study with another teacher. So there is Sudhana going out by himself and learned from many teachers. He got to know fifty-three teachers and learned a lot from all. Among these teachers, there are children, there are non-Buddhists, there are women, there are men, there are old people, there are young people. All kinds of teachers. He does not mind learning from anyone.

One day Sudhana met Mr. Love. His name is Maitreya, the future Buddha, who is supposed to be with us now, by this time, to continue the work of Shakyamuni Buddha. Maitreya Buddha is supposed to be here with us, right now. *Maitri* means love, and Maitreya means Mr. Love. Maybe he is already here, but you don't recognize her. Because you have an idea of how a Buddha would look. Remove that idea, and you will meet Maitreya, Mr. Love, right here and right now. This teacher is always smiling, and so nice, so kind, so compassionate, so loving, that he takes the hand of Sudhana for a long walk, enjoying everything in the Avatamsaka world. And they come to a tower, a stupa, that is locked and Mr. Love says: “Dear young man, there are a lot of wonderful things within this tower. Would you like to go in and visit?” And Sudhana says, “Yes, why not?” Sudhana is very eager of learning, of seeing things, is very open. And you know, Sudhana is in yourself. And how to open the door of the Vairochana Tower? Vairochana is the name of the tower. Vairochana means the Buddha of the living Dharma.

Standing in front of the door, Mr. love practices breathing in and out, and knocks on the door, opens it, and sees that it is immense inside. A lot of space, only space. Suddenly there is no limit anymore, there is endless space, and inside there are trees, there are rivers, there are mountains, there are moons, there are galaxies. The Vairochana tower contains everything, and they enjoy visiting the mountains, rivers and galaxies in the Vairochana tower. Then they come to

another tower, which is called Vairochana tower number two. And Mr. Love says, “Young man, do you want to go in and visit?” And he says why not? So they come to the tower, the door opens and there is endless space, endless time, countless galaxies, rivers and mountains, exactly like the first tower. And of course you know that inside there is another Vairochana tower, Vairochana tower number three. Look at this flower. It is like that. There is a flower within, and within that flower, there is another flower. Sudhana was so happy practicing with that teacher called Mr. Love.

Later, when they said good-bye, he met with another teacher who told him this: “You have to meet the mother of the Buddha because she is a wonderful teacher. Her name is Lady Mahamaya.” “How can I meet her? Where should I go to have a chance to meet her?” And that teacher said, “You don't have to go anywhere, you just stay there, and if you know how to practice touching the earth, you'll see her.”

You know, in Plum Village, we offer the practice of touching the earth. You come back to yourself entirely. You surrender yourself. You surrender your separate self. You become one with earth. And you use 100 per cent of yourself to touch the earth. And practicing like that seven days, suddenly Sudhana saw a huge lotus flower springing up from the earth. A lotus flower with one thousand petals. Right there in front of him. Suddenly he saw himself sitting on one of the petals of the lotus flower. It was wonderful. In no time at all, that petal of the lotus was transformed into a full lotus with one thousand petals. In one of the petals is the whole flower, with many petals, and in each petal of that second flower, there is also a whole flower. It is like the Vairochana palace. The lotus seed that I just offered to the child is like that. You can see in it the lotus pond, and in the lotus pond there is another seed, and if you look into the lotus, you will see another lotus pond, to infinity. That is not something abstract. You yourself are a lotus seed. You contain all the cosmos, all the ancestors, all generations of children and grandchildren. Take good care of yourself. Touch yourself deeply.

Sudhana saw himself sitting on a full lotus with one thousand petals, and he just looked up and he saw Lady Mahamaya sitting on another lotus, looking down at him, smiling with compassion and love. Sudhana bowed to her, "Lady, honorable lady, I had been looking for you." There is a conversation between the two persons recorded in a chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra called “Entering the Inconceivable Realm.” There is an English translation of the Avatamsaka available.

The conversation goes like this:

"Do you know something, young man? When I conceived Shidatta I was so happy. When Shidatta entered my womb, I was the happiest lady on earth. I felt that I had no more desire. I had a Buddha within me; what else do I want? I didn't have any other projects, I didn't have any other desires, and that is why I was so happy." A person without desire is a happy person because she has everything in her, the most valuable things in her. She doesn't have to run and to seek for them anymore.

Young man, do you know something? After Shidatta had gone into my womb, countless bodhisattvas, Buddhas-to-be, came to me, and wanted to go in too, to see whether it was comfortable in there for their friend Shidattta. Countless bodhisattvas were there, and they wanted to get in, and before I could say anything, they all entered into my womb. And you know something, young man? If there were millions more who would have liked to go in, there was still space inside me."

That is the language of the Avatamsaka. The millions of bodhisattvas, if they want to go in and see whether Shidatta is comfortable in there, there is still plenty of space. In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of space inside as well as outside.

"You know something, young man? I am the mother of all Buddhas in the past, I am the mother of all Buddhas in the present, and I am the mother of all Buddhas in the future. You should know that. You should train yourself to look at me and to see that."

Sudhana learned a lot. Not only did he see that Lady Mahamaya is the mother of all Buddhas, but he looked into himself and he saw that he is the father of all Buddhas of the past, of the future, and of the present moment. And in Avatamsaka, all of us are pregnant with a Buddha inside. Whether you are a gentleman or a lady, you are pregnant with a Buddha inside, and you are happy. You don't try to look for anything else because you know that Buddha-nature is within you. You know that the Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God, according to the Gospels, is like a grain, a seed, a mustard seed, exactly the same kind of language. The Kingdom of God is contained in a mustard seed. If you know how to do, to take care of the mustard seed, the mustard seed will become a tree, and all the birds in the cosmos can come and take refuge. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Buddha realm, the Avatamsaka realm, is within you. You need only to touch it. All generations of ancestors are within you: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. Why do you want to look for the Buddha, for Jesus, somewhere else? God is not the old man in the sky. God is

alive in you. The Kingdom of God is also in you; just touch and make it manifest. We may need a little bit of training, like the children who need to know how to handle the lotus seed in order for the lotus seed to become a lotus pond. You need a little bit of training, that's all.

[Bell]

In the Lotus Sutra it is taught by the Buddha that everyone has the *Buddhata*, Buddha-nature within, and you are a Buddha. There is a baby Buddha waiting in you and you might lead your daily life in such a way to allow the Buddha in you to bloom, like a lotus seed, to become a lotus pond. Before this teaching, many disciples of the Buddha thought that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha. The maximum you could be was a disciple of the Buddha, an arhat, someone who can transform entirely the afflictions and get free from all suffering, but that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha.

According to the Lotus Sutra, everyone is a Buddha to be, and the Buddha is available within, you can touch anytime. A Buddha is not limited in time and in space. You don't have to go anywhere to touch a Buddha. You just stay where you are, and the Buddha is available. The Buddha does not have to undergo birth and death. The Buddha is always alive, the living Buddha within. So don't think that the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu and entered maha-parnirvana in Kushinagara. That is only a manifested body of the Buddha. The true Buddha was not 2600 years ago only: the true Buddha you can touch in the here and the now. And while the Buddha was revealing the true nature of Buddha in everyone, suddenly there was a voice in space, calling "Wonderful, wonderful, Shakyamuni Buddha, you are preaching the Lotus Sutra to your assembly, wonderful, wonderful." And everyone looked up and saw a huge and beautiful stupa in the sky, decorated with all kinds of jewels, seven kinds of jewels. The very beautiful voice came from within the stupa, the tower, in the sky. Everyone was amazed. How could a stupa appear from the empty space like that, with a wonderful voice coming from within, and praising the Buddha Shakyamuni for giving that wonderful teaching about the Buddha nature. They turned toward their root teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, who was sitting on a rock on the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India, asking him with their eyes, and the Buddha smiled and said that is Prabhutaratna Buddha. He is sitting inside a stupa and he has been offering these words of praise for the Lotus Sutra. You know the Prabhutaratna Buddha has made a vow that everywhere in the cosmos, if there is a Buddha offering the teaching of the lotus about the nature of the Buddha he would come in the form of a stupa, and pronounce these words of praise. That is why today, since I am offering that wonderful teaching he is here to acknowledge it, and to praise me for offering you the teaching.

Everyone in the assembly wanted so badly to see the face of the Prabhutaratna Buddha; they look again at their root teacher and said, "how could we open the door of the stupa so that we could see the Prabhutaratna Buddha in person? We want to see him?" That's very human. All of us are like that: we want to see forms, to see the person who is praising our teacher. We love him because we love our teacher; therefore we love the one who is praising our teacher. That's very human.

The Buddha said, "It is not easy, my dear, because unless I can call back all my manifested bodies in the cosmos, I cannot open this door for eternity for you to see Prabhutaratna Buddha. You know something, you think I am the Buddha, I am the only Buddha, your teacher who is sitting here. In fact that is not true. I am everywhere, I am everywhere in the cosmos, and I am doing exactly the same thing as I do here. I have countless manifested bodies existing in every corner of the cosmos, and while I am teaching the Lotus Sutra here, countless manifested bodies of mine are offering at the same time the teaching on the lotus, and to open the door of the stupa, I have to summon, to call back all of my manifested bodies to be able to open this."

And everyone was looking at the Buddha pleading that he call back all his manifested bodies to be able to open the door for them to see with their own eyes the Buddha within. With a lot of compassion the Buddha wanted to do what seemed to be very difficult to do, for the love of his disciples he tried. He sent out a beam from his forehead, and that beam shot all around the cosmos, and suddenly they came. The assembly saw countless Shakyamuni Buddhas, they look like their teacher, they are coming from every direction, and suddenly space is filled with Shakyamuni Buddhas, countless of them. Now they realize that what they have thought to be their teacher is just a very small part of their teacher. Their teacher is not just a person of sixty kilograms sitting on the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The person of their teacher is huge, is the whole cosmos, existing everywhere in the whole cosmos. Now they have removed one idea of Buddha. They now begin to see their teacher in a different way. Their teacher cannot be just touched in time and space; their teacher has the kind of longevity that cannot be measured. Their teacher has the kind of presence that can be felt in every corner of the cosmos.

Then with all these manifested bodies, Shakyamuni made a gesture, and suddenly the door of the stupa opened. But still many people couldn't see it because everyone was sitting on the ground. Only the heavenly beings, great bodhisattvas who stay up in the air, could look and see the Buddha in the stupa. But all of us are still there, grounded to the floor of the Gridhrakuta Mountain

and they could not see, and they again look at their teacher and plead for help. You have to be on the same level in order to see. If you stay where you are you cannot see: you have to go up to the same level to see it. Otherwise, the Buddha will have to bring it down to you, or bring you up to it.

The Buddha is made of a lot of compassion, and that is why Shakyamuni Buddha tried to help. With his magical power he lifted the whole assembly up, and now everyone could see Prabhutaratna Buddha sitting in the tower. Suddenly Prabhutaratna Buddha smiled and made room in his seat, and invited Shakyamuni Buddha to come and sit together with him, and there the two Buddhas sitting together, the Buddha of eternity, and the Buddha of time and space, they were sitting together to show the assembly that there are two levels. The Buddha manifested as a sight, and the Buddha as your true nature, they are one, they are always one. You should not discriminate.

It's a wonderful sutra. It speaks with images. Prabhutaratna Buddha is the Buddha of the cosmos, and Shakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of time and space, who appeared on earth for us as a teacher. Yet they are one. If you know to look deeply into Shakyamuni Buddha, you will see the Buddha of the cosmos, everywhere at any time, he is not limited to time and space, and therefore you don't have to go to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to meet him. You can stay right here, and he is available, because there are many manifested bodies of Shakyamuni in the world for you to see, to teach, to touch, and to learn from. If you know how to listen, the sound of the wind can be the teaching about the Four Noble Truths. If you know how to listen to the birds, the sound of the birds can be the teaching of the Eightfold Path. If you know how to contemplate the sunflowers, the sunflowers can reveal the Buddha-Land to you. It's right here, it's right now, the Buddha-Land, the Buddha, the Kingdom of God. You have to be alive to touch it, to live it. Don't waste your life running and looking somewhere else. It is right there.

If you know how to look, how to touch deeply, you will become birthless and deathless, because the nature of everything that is, is without birth and without death. You are in everything else, everything else is in you. Birth and death are just notions that scare us, and if you are able to remove the notions, you get the gift of non-fear, and only with non-fear can true happiness be possible.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra you read this gatha: "All things are birth-less. All things have no extinction. You are also like that. If you know how to look at things this way, you can see and touch all Buddhas at any time." That is a four-line gatha in the Avatamsaka Sutra, in fact it is in the chapter on the Suyama Heaven.

There were so many bodhisattvas from the cosmos coming to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to listen to the dharma talk, and many of them offered to stay there to help the Buddha, because they see that the Buddha works very hard. This planet earth has so much suffering, and the Buddha has to take care of all the living beings on this planet earth. Although he has disciples who help him to take care of the people who need help, it does not seem that he has enough assistance to take care of the people. That is why countless bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos volunteered to stay to help the Buddha. The Buddha smiled and said, "Thank you. We have enough people here to do the work." So he pointed to the ground, and suddenly from the earth sprung up countless bodhisattvas. Everyone was beautiful, everyone was a dharma teacher, dharma teachers of every kind: young, less young, male, female, all of them are wonderful teachers, all of them are beautiful, and all of them bow to the Buddha. They all have been trained by the Buddha to be workers on this planet earth.

Shariputra asked the Buddha, "Dear teacher, you were born just forty or fifty years ago in Kapilavastu. How could you have had time to train so many dharma teachers, so many bodhisattvas to assist you?" The Buddha smiled and said, "Shariputra, you have seen me only in this life span. I am not limited in time. You have not seen me in my totality. You have only seen me as a manifested body. You have to touch the Buddha deeper to see that the longevity of the Buddha is infinite, and the presence of the Buddha is unlimited, and that is why I have been able to train countless bodhisattvas as dharma teachers. That is why I have thanked bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos, because here they have enough people to order to take care of the planet earth.

Every word, every sentence of the sutras reveal the same kind of truth, inter-being, the here and the now, the nature of connectedness of everything, everything is inside of everything else, the one contains the all, the all contains the one. If you are able to observe, to look deeply, and touch that kind of nature, you will become birth-less and deathless, and you will be able to touch the Buddha at any time you want. Dear friends, we are going to practice walking meditation together this morning. Let's try to step into the Dharmadhatu and become birth-less and deathless. This is possible. Among us there are those who can stay longer in the Dharmadhatu, and every time they hear the sound of the bell, they go back to the Dharmadhatu. Those of us who have not been trained, we continue to stay and suffer in the lokadhatu, suffer because our view of separateness, or our lack of insight of inter-being. That is why the training is for us to break through, to know how to look at things in their inter-being nature, to touch the nature of no birth and no death. Happiness is available if you know how to step into the Dharmadhatu, the Avatamsaka realm. In the Avatamsaka realm, there is a lot of light. Everyone is emitting light. There is a lot of space.

You don't complain there is no space inside and outside. There is unlimited time. You don't complain that time is running out. There are a lot of flowers. Everything you look at can be transformed into a flower that contains all other kinds of flowers. There are a lot of comfortable lion seats. Wherever you sit may become a lion seat. A lion seat is a place where you can find stability, freedom, you don't want to run anymore, and the Avatamsaka realm is available here and now if you know how to step into it.

After the walking meditation, all of us are invited to join in the formal meal. In a three-month retreat, monks and nun used to have a formal meal every day. So we want to show you how we eat a formal meal in mindfulness. There is a little bit of chanting, an offering of the food to all Buddhas in the cosmos, there will be a sharing of the food for other living beings, and we eat in mindfulness so that peace and joy and brotherhood can be there. We inherit, we profit from the mindfulness coming from everyone in the assembly. Everyone is eating in such a way that the Avatamsaka realm is possible in the here and the now, and that is why when we put ourselves in that situation, it may be penetrated by a lot of light and happiness. We have reduced the ritual to the minimum so it will be pleasant for all of us.

Let us practice walking in such a way that with every step we can touch the Avatamsaka realm. I remember six years ago we had a June retreat for 21 days, and after the talk on the Avatamsaka, there was a very beautiful walk. There was some sunshine, the vegetation was beautiful and everyone felt very clearly that they were in it. Everyone was happy, everyone saw everything in a very different way, and I hope this will be possible today with the collective mindfulness and concentration of the Sangha.